

Community Growth and Land Use Planning, Fall 2001: Prof. Terry Szold

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## Executive Summary

#### Overview

Under the leadership of Professor Terry Szold, of MIT's Department of Urban Studies and Planning, a team of graduate students worked during the Fall of 2001 on issues of "Community Growth and Land Use Planning" (the title of Professor Szold's course) in the City of Newton. The context for this enterprise was the Framework for Newton's Planning, transmitted to Newton's mayor in August 2000 by a Framework Planning Committee that had been appointed by the mayor in 1998. The Committee's objective was to articulate the "consensus values for a planning framework [that would] guide later, more detailed studies" (page 1).

Having been asked by Michael Kruse, Newton's director of planning, to focus on Newton Centre, the MIT team's goal was to produce a series of planning recommendations that would not only reflect some of the key elements of the Framework in general, but would specifically build on Newton Centre's considerable strengths — and confront some of its major challenges — in order to provide a series of pathways leading to the district's future.

The team's energies were spent within the bounds of Langley Road and Beacon Street to the east; Union Street to the south; Lyman Street to the north; and Centre Street to the west. As the "Centre's center," this area is already one of Newton's major commercial districts. It is also, the team found, an area of remarkable civic promise.

Before the promise comes the reality. Through careful analysis of Newton Centre's history and current conditions, and incorporating input from numerous conversations and interviews with members of the Centre's community, the team produced the following set of findings:

- A perceived parking problem;
- A highly impacted traffic circulation system;
- A lack of retail diversity;
- A lack of housing both affordable and market-rate in or near the center;
- A desire for a stronger central "place" by which to identify Newton Centre.

## Strategies

Based on these findings, the team's proposals fall into the following broad categories:

- Re-imagine the space now occupied by the central parking lot so that it becomes a multiuse public gathering place;
- Re-place the grade-level parking spaces now in the center;
- Re-organize the traffic circulation patterns within the bounded area;

 Re-consider the ways in which the land within and near the bounded area is currently being used.

#### Recommendations

As initial steps in the implementation of these strategies, the team put together the following recommendations:

## Multi-use public gathering space

Create an indoor-outdoor performing and visual arts complex that would accommodate a permanent farmer's market, as well as a bookstore and café, as a new "Forum" for Newton Centre.

#### New parking

Build a two-level, below-grade garage beneath the new Forum, or a multi-level, above-grade garage behind Walgreen's.

## Affordable housing

Develop mixed-use commercial/residential buildings at strategic places in Newton Centre's business district to promote alternative housing opportunities and increase density for a more active centre.

#### Land use

Create new zoning overlay districts both for the Centre and for the "Gateway" area immediately outside the Center; establish design guidelines to ensure compliance with Newton Centre's history and its vision for the future.

The following pages not only detail these strategies and recommendations but propose an outline for implementation. Above all, they provide a way for the reader to access their own strategies and recommendations — a way to create a new reality and fulfill a new promise.

#### Introduction

Newton Centre has many assets that can be strengthened through thoughtful strategic planning. We also identify a number of challenges that should be addressed if the area is to retain its diversity and charm. The general assets and challenges found through the MIT team's research are outlined in the section that begins on the following page, and reflect existing land use conditions.

More detailed discussion of assets and challenges, as well as recommendations and implementation strategies for future project planning in the district, are contained within sections of this report on "The Forum," "Parking," "Circulation," "Housing and Mixed-Use," and "Land Use."

The section on "The Forum" looks at the space now occupied by nearly two acres of parking in the middle of the business district. The following section is a study of parking issues in the district, including all public and private lots of significant size. "Circulation" considers the need for improved vehicle and pedestrian movement around the district. The section on "Housing and Mixed-Use" discusses the ways new development in the district could meet several social and economic needs. The final section sets forth a series of recommendations for land use, including overlay districts and design review guidelines.

## Assets and Challenges

#### What we're building on

Before considering the possibility of any physical intervention in Newton Centre, the MIT team began by examining the district's history — not only as captured in the Framework for Newton's Planning, but as seen through old photographs. It was illuminating to discover the image of a three-story school occupying what is now the district's main parking lot, surrounded by compact, multi-story residential and commercial buildings (Fig. 1).

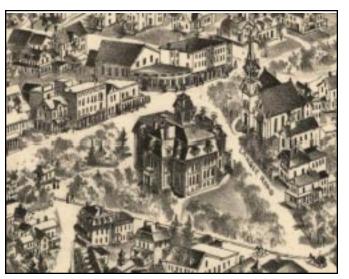


Fig. 1: Newton Centre, 1897

Similarly, we took note of the impact of transportation links on Newton's development generally and on its village structure. As the Framework points out, "frequent commuter rail service to Boston was instrumental in establishing Newton as a desirable residential suburb, with most of the new houses being constructed close to railroad depots." This 19th century version of what has come to be called "transit-oriented development" contributed to our focus on the agglomeration of challenges represented by the transportation issue.



Fig. 2. Union Street



Fig. 3: Langley Road

History is also represented by many of the existing individual buildings and building groupings that comprise the center. Among these are Piccadilly Square, the MBTA station, Union Street (Fig.2), and the part of Langley Road that faces the parking lot (Fig. 3). In these cases, the overall scale, the pedestrian-friendly quality, the building materials — all are physical manifestations of the values enumerated in the 2000 Framework Plan for Newton's Planning.

We engaged in further analysis simply by walking the streets of Newton Centre. We took a visual inventory of both the desirable aspects of the district — including the historical buildings and streets mentioned above and the sculptures on the Centre Green — and the elements that need improvement, such as the facades of businesses along Langley Road, Beacon Street, and Centre Street, the lack of clear signage for both pedestrians and drivers, the poor traffic circulation, and the challenge of finding or creating clear edges and identifying landmarks for Newton Centre.

## The Community Perspective

Beyond collecting our own information, we wanted to gauge the attitude of those who pass through, work, or live in Newton Centre. As we stood in front of Johnnie's Restaurant over a period of several days, we asked nearly 50 people to fill out a brief questionnaire on which they could indicate their own views of Newton Centre's assets and challenges.

The consensus on assets included:

- Its attraction to residents and visitors from throughout the area;
- The collection of sculptures on the Centre Green;
- Its overall physical appearance;
- Its access to public transportation;
- Its "convenience."

Regarding challenges, those surveyed listed:

- A lack of markets (e.g., produce, fish);
- A lack of moderately-priced stores;
- A lack of sufficient open space;
- A lack of public spaces;
- An overabundance of traffic as people felt uncomfortable crossing the major intersections in the area, particularly at rush hour;
- Barely enough parking.

## The Business Perspective

We also interviewed a number of business owners and managers of many of the key enterprises in Newton Centre. Here again, the list of assets is provocative:

• The ease of access via public transportation;

The aspects of a college town;

Places where one can walk around, sit in the park, or have a cup of coffee;

Special events, such as sidewalk sales or a kids' carnival in the park.

As for the challenges, our interviews produced the following:

The need to gain and retain a wider economic mix of shops — a "support system" that would include hardware, grocery, and convenience stores;

Constant pressures on parking;

Traffic back-ups on Center Street and Beacon Street.

### A Summary of Concerns

One owner of a major, long-time retail business bemoaned the difficulty in offering any kind of identifying landmark to those traveling to his shop from outside Newton. The best he could do, he said, was a parking lot. Given the nature of his enterprise and of his customer base, he wished he could offer something more.

One of the main complaints of shoppers we interviewed was that many of the stores they had depended on in Newton Centre had disappeared. While there are stores in Newton Centre, they tend to sell high-end fashions that many people cannot afford. There are lots of restaurants that people frequent, but no longer a hardware or grocery store. In fact, the only place where people could walk to get a gallon of milk was at the Walgreen's. While the loss of these facilities has happened throughout the country as suburban downtowns have been supplanted by the convenience of the mall, many people we spoke with were troubled by this loss of a sense of place. Without the basic conveniences that people expect from a village center, there is no particular reason to visit or linger.

#### Land Use

Newton Centre has a range of building types and sizes, some of which contribute to the character and attractiveness of the streetscape and some of which detract from the feeling that Newton Centre is a unique place to live, work, or visit. There are destinations like Union Street with two -or three- story mixed-use historic buildings that house a variety of restaurants, shops, and apartments. There are also streets lined with newer developments that tend to be one-story buildings. That seem to belong in a suburban shopping mall rather than an historic village center. Residents reminded us that Newton Centre once sported the kinds of places – a local movie house, a hardware store, a school, even tenement apartments if one looked back far enough into the past – that might now increase the area's vitality and diversity. How did these establishments come to be replaced and what replaced them? In particular, what land use incentives and disincentives lead to the kind of development changes at work in Newton Centre?

### Elements of Zoning

Newton Centre incorporates a number of different land uses through seven different zoning designations. These designations indicate what can or cannot be built in the specific areas. The districts include Business District 1 (BU1); Business District 2 (BU2); Multi-Resident Districts(MR1, MR2 and MR3); and a Single Resident District (SR1) and as well as some land zoned for public use (PUB). A wide range of uses is permitted in the districts, labelled BU1 and BU2 in Fig.4, including offices, banks, retail stores, restaurants, and parking. Dwelling units above the ground floor are also an allowable use. In practice, all of these development types exist in Newton Centre. Most of the housing units are on the periphery of our focus area, whereas most singlestory retail uses over look the central parking lot.

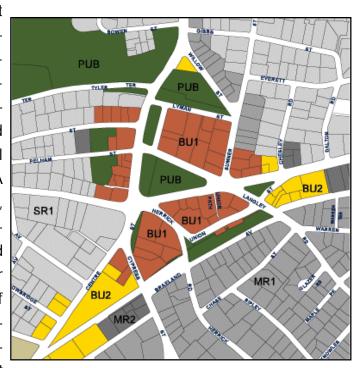


Fig. 4. Newton Centre's current zoning districts

The land in the team's focus area is primarily zoned BU1 with two small sections of BU2

on Beacon and Centre streets just outside the periphery of the central parking lot, which serves as the center of our map. The two Business Districts have nearly the same zoning requirements, except that BU2 allows greater building heights (up to four stories) and a higher Floor Area Ratio (upto 2.0) by special permit (see chart below).

City of Newton Zoning Ordinances Requirements

District	Max # Stories	Building Height (Feet)	Total Allowable FAR	Gross Floor Area (Square Feet)	Setbacks (Front)
Business 1					
As of Right	2	24	1.0	10,000-19,000	Avg.*
by Special Permit	3	36	1.5	20,000 +	
Business 2					
As of Right	2	24	1.0	10,000-19,000	Avg. *
By Special Permit	4	48	2.0	20,000 +	1.5 bldg ht

Floor Area Ratio (FAR) is designed to regulate the bulk of a building along with building heights. FAR relates a building's mass to the lot on which it is built. It is defined as the total floor area on a zoning lot divided by the area of that zoning lot. As opposed to strict building height requirements, FAR affords greater design flexibility as developers can select alternative building configurations.

The FAR that is allowed as of right in BU1 and BU2 Districts is 1.0. Given this FAR, the most economical and efficient way to develop a site is to cover the entire parcel with a one-story building.<sup>1</sup> In this way, developers can maximize the ground floor commercial space. The existing zoning thus calls for low-rise and low-density development. A one-story box-shaped building can be constructed without a special permit or process as long as the gross floor area is less than 20,000 square feet. As a result, many "mini big box" retail spaces have been built with lower FARs than the more historic buildings located throughout the center. However, the older buildings in Newton Centre, some of which have architectural significance for the region, are those that the community has expressed an interest in preserving and duplicating.

While the current zoning ordinances may not expressly prohibit a mix of uses or a density of development that is compatible with a village center, the regulations do not necessarily encourage compact or coherent growth.

<sup>1.</sup> Although the City's zoning ordinances prevent 100 percent lot coverage without a waiver of on-site parking requirements.

#### What the MIT Team is Building

Thomas Lee, in an article published in Urban Land magazine, has noted that "place making combines a wide mix of uses in a pedestrian-oriented environment to create a new public realm that gives a community its heart, character, and identity. In a true 'place,' all kinds of people come together for a variety of everyday activities, seven days a week."

In the process of collecting information and knowledge about Newton Centre, we began to think about ways in which its history can be renewed, and the community can be sustained. We thought about spaces that are currently "open," but that are not truly public — that is, spaces that could provide a kind of common ground for the diverse interests of a diverse community. In that light, it's worth noting Lee's further observation; "Although stores, housing, and offices are important, it is cultural and civic facilities — a library, a town hall, a post office, a theater, a school, a museum — that give a town center stability and prestige and help to attract people there day and night."

The lack of reason to come to Newton Centre was lamented by many people in the community. People told us that the parking lot used to be a school, that there used to be a movie theatre, a grocery store, a hardware store, and housing above these stores. What is interesting in all these remarks is the desire to return to the days when Newton Centre really served as a town center. We were told again and again that currently there was little in Newton Centre besides the parking lot.

Given the history, the assets, and the challenges, we ventured to imagine what that "something more" might be: How might one go about further activating the center of Newton Centre? What ideas might we put forward whose goal would be to build on the best that Newton Centre has to offer — ideas that could, in fact, start a dialogue among the citizens of Newton Centre so that the ultimate solution is theirs?

### The Forum

To provide a new sense of place, we conceived of a multi-purpose performance, gallery, and meeting space, to replace the central above grade parking lot — a space we call "The Forum."

The American Heritage Dictionary offers this second definition of forum: "any public meeting for open discussion." Through discussion, through conversation, through the creation of spaces in which different kinds of conversations — some planned, some spontaneous — can take place,

the Forum becomes the identifier, the active symbol of Newton Centre's life.



Fig. 5. The kinds of places that support conversation

A "black box" performance space, perhaps for children's theater, perhaps for the Newton Players, perhaps for village meetings;

- A gallery space linked to West Newton's Chapel Gallery;
- A satellite bookstore for one of the region's museums, such as the Gardner Museum, the Institute of Contemporary Art, or the DeCordova Museum;
- A twice-weekly indoor-outdoor Farmers' Market, and "Pushcart Pavilion" that would help answer the community's desire for produce stores, and serve as a retail business incubator, similar to the pushcarts in Boston's Quincy Market;
- A Market Café, physically connected to the Market and to the art space, which would contribute to the liveliness of the public spaces and users' comfort in them.

In outlining The Forum we came up with two options that have similar elements but which differ in scope. Each includes:

- Moving the at-grade parking to below-grade or to another site (e.g., a structured parking garage behind the Walgreen's building);
- A central public plaza;
- Ease of pedestrian access.

### Option I

This proposal provides for structures on what is now the central parking lot along the south side of Langley Road and the north side of Beacon Street, as well as an expanded sculpture park along Centre Street.

Each structurewould contain elements of The Forum, with the gallery space, for example, as part of the Beacon Street structure and the performance space contained in the Langley Road structure. Other parts of the buildings would be further articulated with,

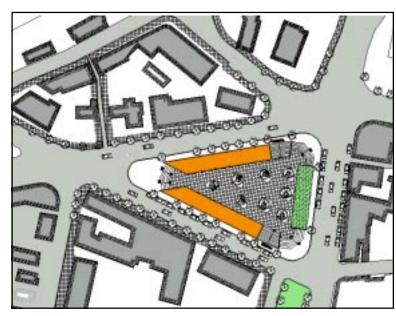


Fig.6. The Forum: Option I

perhaps, an entry into the Market Café, or the book store — in short, a new public realm as outlined by Thomas Lee.

## Option II

Option II concentrates on Langley Road, and proposes a three-story structure containing the services outlined above.

Beacon Street, across from the plaza, would be raised to pedestrian grade, six inches above the street and used as a traffic calming tool. In the plaza itself, there would now be room not only for the Farmers' Market and Pushcart Pavilion, but also for an outdoor performance space or an expansion of the small sculpture park on the Centre Street side.

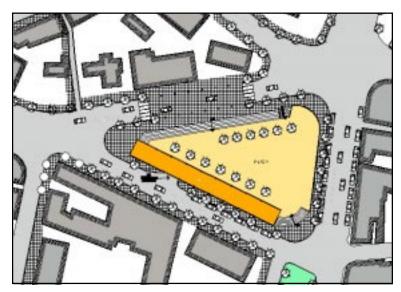


Fig.7. The Forum: Option II

#### Newton Centre's Great Streets

Allan Jacobs, in his book Great Streets, identifies some of the characteristics of his subject. Ultimately, he says, "there is magic to great streets. We are attracted to the best of them not because we have to go there but because we want to be there." And he notes that, "first and foremost, a great street should help make community: should facilitate people acting and interacting to achieve in concert what they might not achieve alone." Such streets need not be grand boulevards; they can be as short as Langley Road or Union Street. The point is that there is an opportunity for Newton to begin to think of these possibilities – to use its history, its assets, its desire to make its streets and the structures around them the containers for magic.

#### Implementation

A collaboration between the Massachusetts Cultural Council, the Nonprofit Finance Fund, and the New England Foundation for the Arts, and the Massachusetts Cultural Facilities Project (MCFP) provides not-for-profit cultural institutions with workshops, planning grants, and low-interest loans for capital projects. Newton might consider applying for such a grant, through its cultural council, for the purpose of undertaking a feasibility study in connection with The Forum.

The city's ownership of the central parking lot is a unique opportunity. Already, the city has received requests from developers to build on the center lot. The Forum, the open space, and the placement of parking could be financed through a public-private partnership between the city and private developers.

## Parking

Any proposal for development in Newton Centre, whether for a new performing arts center, for housing, or for a civic-oriented space, must take into consideration the parking situation. Newton is a largely automobile dependent city and the ease of vehicular access is crucial for most of its citizens. While the city has been able to accommodate this demand, it has also spurred commercial centers dominated by surface parking.

Newton Centre is a clear example of this emphasis on parking. Not only does a parking lot occupy the most prominent physical location in the area, but surface parking accounts for a large amount of the total land area in Newton Centre as indicated by the red areas in the aerial photo.



Fig.8. Surface parking in Newton Centre

A simplified parking survey conducted by our team showed that available parking spaces in Newton Centre are heavily subscribed during the business day and on weekends.<sup>2</sup> Parking in the central lot is at capacity with 100% of its 119 spaces occupied during the business day. Often, cars circle the lot waiting for parking spaces to become available. This demand for the central lot is also associated with traffic problems on Beacon Street as cars waiting to enter the lot clog up thru traffic. On-street parking faces a similar situation, with spaces on Langley Road, Beacon, Centre, and Union streets heavily subscribed. Past parking surveys completed for the City's Planning department verify this demand.

While utilized by some customers, private parking lots located behind businesses in Newton Centre tend to be substantially less crowded. As an example, our group observed that the three parking lots located in back of businesses on Langley Road (whose primary entrances are from Lyman Street) were generally only 50 to 75 percent subscribed during the business day.

Development proposals for Newton Centre must take into account the potential impact 2. A survey of parking was conducted during the course of two business days and on one Saturday in October 2001.

upon parking, given the demand for and importance of parking in the area (Fig.9). Our team has identified two parking proposals that could be developed in conjunction with a public use facility on the site of the current central lot . These proposals would replace the spaces lost through the removal of the central lot and accommodate any new demand that the public use facility would generate.





Fig. 9. above: Central parking, current conditions Fig. 9. below: Central parking, possible park on grade

#### Recommendations

#### Proposal #1: Below-grade structured parking

One proposal for parking in Newton Centre is the development of a below-grade parking facility on the site of the present central lot. The construction of a below-grade lot would allow for the development of the site into a public use facility while maintaining and enhancing parking service in Newton Centre. Two to three parking decks would be enough to accommodate parking demand; a below-grade lot might take the form of the structure depicted in the section drawing on the next page.

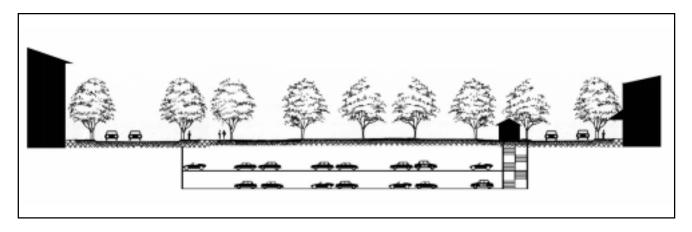


Fig. 10. Section drawing proposing below-grade parking on two levels

Below-grade structured parking has been an innovative solution in a number of communities and urban areas that are faced with the challenge of creating pleasant urban spaces while accommodating parking demands. While no situation is perfectly analogous to Newton Centre, successful examples of below-grade parking exist. One of the most successful has been Post Office Square in Boston (Fig.11.), which accommodates high parking demand while providing an engaging park space above.



Fig.11. Boston's Post Office Square, a precedent for the conversion of surface parking to public space above grade.

The greatest obstacle to the development of below-grade parking is cost, as it is the most expensive form of parking to build. However, many communities have viewed below-grade parking as the best solution to their needs and have successfully financed its development costs. The costs for below-grade parking of the type we are proposing in the Boston area averages \$30,000 per space with costs varying based on soil conditions, the depth of the structure, and the materials used.<sup>3</sup> While more expensive than other forms of parking, our team believes that Newton can manage the costs of development for a below-grade structure. In the past year, a developer has approached the City of Newton proposing to build below-grade parking on the site as part of a larger development package, suggesting that the costs of such a structure are in line with what the market will bear. If the City decided to develop its own municipal lot on the site, construction costs could be offset through modest user fees for the lot as well as shared parking agreements with area businesses.

<sup>3</sup> Based on conversation with the marketing department of Walker Parking Consultants, Boston, MA.

### Proposal 2: Parking Structure on Lyman Street

Below-grade parking is not the only option available to the City. Sufficient parking could be accommodated through the development of a structured parking garage on one of the three current surface parking lots adjacent to Lyman Street. As parking needs are relatively modest, a two -or three- tier parking structure could be developed on the site in keeping with surrounding building heights and massing. Access to this garage could be provided both from Lyman Street as well as Langley Road. A parking structure on the site could take the form represented in the image shown below.



Fig. 12. Possible above grade parking garage behind Langley Road

As with the first proposal, the development of a parking garage could be financed through a number of mechanisms. Average costs for the development of above-ground structured parking range from \$5,000 to \$15,000 per space with annual maintenance costs of \$650 per year; costs once again vary depending on the facility's size and the materials employed. These costs could be covered through the implementation of appropriated parking fees or shared parking agreements. In addition, the City may wish to consider soliciting a private developer for the construction and operation of a parking garage.

## Other Parking Mitigation Strategies

In addition to below- or above-grade parking structures, Newton Centre can accommodate its redevelopment and associated parking demands through a variety of parking mitigation strategies. These parking solutions can be grouped broadly in the following two categories: (1) more efficient use of existing parking capacity and (2) reduction of parking demand.

<sup>4.</sup> International Parking Institute, IPI Resource Center web page, http://www.parking.org/resource.htm; November 2001.

#### Improved Parking Efficiency

Existing parking capacity in Newton Centre can be used more efficiently, limiting the need to develop additional parking spaces or structures. As mentioned previously, a number of lots located behind area businesses tend to be under-subscribed during peak business hours. More effective use of these spaces could be promoted through clearer signage that provides information on the availability and location of this parking. The City of Newton could also maximize its current surface parking by encouraging long-term parkers, such as employees of Newton Centre businesses, to use off-site or fringe parking facilities.

Valet parking is another idea that has been used successfully in affluent New England towns. Visitors pay a nominal fee (\$2-\$3.00) and have their cars parked by valets who are able to maximize lot space through more compact parking.

Finally, the City could promote greater utilization of parking that is shared between businesses and other uses to maximize parking efficiency. For example, businesses with different peak business hours could share lots and reduce the total number of parking spaces that would be necessary if each business provided parking individually.

## Reducing Demand

The reduction of parking demand is another area in which the City should be pro-active if it wishes to reduce congestion and automobile dependence in Newton Centre. At \$0.25 an hour, parking in Newton Centre is extremely inexpensive. A more effective pricing scheme would create a disincentive to drive or park for excessive periods of time, while keeping parking convenient and affordable for customers in Newton Centre. Whether focusing on the current central lot or newly developed parking structures, the City should consider charging a higher rate, perhaps \$2-\$3 per hour, and in 10 or 15 minute increments. This parking fee scheme would encourage drivers to park for only the periods of time necessary to conduct their business or to come via other modes of transportation. Businesses that are more sensitive to the amount of time that patrons park, such as restaurants and cafes, could provide parking validation for the first hour of parking.

Increasing the amount of short term parking in Newton Centre could also reduce parking demand. Under this scheme, existing long-term parking spots could be replaced with more short-term spots. Once again this would encourage users to economize on the time they park their cars. Parking rates could be kept the same, while the allowable parking time would be

reduced.

Newton should also work towards improving transit alternatives that get people out of their cars and into other forms of transportation. These improvements could take a number of forms. The City could lobby the MBTA to improve Green Line service and make it more convenient for people to commute both in and out of Newton Centre. There could be greater provisions for bicyclists such as more bike parking racks and the creation of bike lanes on Beacon and Centre streets. Newton's Nexus bus is a free shuttle service connecting locations in Newton not served by other transportation lines. While demand has been limited to elderly residents and local students, Nexus can be a critical part of the strategy to reduce parking demand. Activating the shuttle service among the village centers will discourage automobile usage within Newton while reinforcing the value of public transit. The City could work to improve the functionality of the Nexus bus system, perhaps by providing more effective information on routes and services.

Finally, other Boston area communities have successfully implemented car sharing using "Zipcar" as a means of providing mobility to residents while freeing them from the necessity of car ownership. To rent a Zipcar, a user pays a deposit (\$30) for access to a car that he or she then signs out at \$5.00 an hour, which is much more economical for car renters who may not need a car for an entire day. It also eliminates the secondary costs of car ownership, which include insurance, maintenance, and parking space fees. The Zipcar is parked in a central location that is accessible to the various users and the system operates much like a cooperative. Zipcars reduce parking demand by reducing the overall number of cars needed and the subsequent parking spots that they would require.

### Circulation

The issues with circulation in Newton Centre can be divided into two areas: (1) traffic flow and (2) way finding.

#### Traffic Flow

The traffic problem is concentrated at two intersections: Centre and Beacon streets, and Beacon Street and Langley Road. Traffic back-ups at both points are complicated by secondary streets that feed into the larger arteries or siphon off vehicles from them. The already heavy traffic flowing from Centre and Beacon streets is swollen further by vehicles coming from Cypress Street; at Beacon Street and Langley Road, traffic is siphoned onto Sumner Street. During peak commuting hours and at lunchtime, these intersections can become major bottlenecks.

Besides the sheer number of cars, the traffic problem is exacerbated by a lack of places for pedestrians to stand as they make their way across key intersections. The overall effect is to make the streets forbidding to pedestrians, when ideally they would feel comfortable enough to cross the streets at various points.

#### Way Finding

Newton Centre is relatively easy to navigate if you know where you're going. If not, it can be frustrating to find parking, links between different transit options, or pedestrian routes. Part of the problem is the heavy traffic flow along Beacon and Centre streets, which can be intimidating for the less adventurous walkers and cyclists as well as drivers trying to find a parking spot. But there are other challenges, as outlined below:

Parking lots: There is no missing the giant parking lot in the middle of Newton Centre. The lot is well-used. Yet the two city-owned parking lots behind Centre Street and several privately-owned lots behind Langley Road are underused, and drivers cannot easily find the lots from these streets.

Links between transit options: As people leave the MBTA station, they have a choice of three alternatives. One path takes them to the city's parking lot on Cypress Street. A set of steps leads to Union Street. A third path runs up to Langley Road. These paths are helpful for entry and exit, but do not provide connections to the Nexus stop on Beacon Street or the bus stop on Centre Street. Travelers are discouraged from using transit as their overall means of travel.

Pedestrian Routes: The pedestrian passage that connects the MBTA station on Union Street to Beacon Street and the rest of the center, is narrow, isolated, and virtually invisible. Once on Beacon Street, the parking lot impedes easy access to Langley Road, the destination of many visitors.

#### Recommendations

We suggest two possible scenarios for traffic and pedestrian flow. Option one is focused on improving traffic flow, while option two seeks to create a more inviting environment for pedestrians.

#### Traffic flow changes

In Option A (Fig.13)we propose to alter the way traffic flows through Newton Centre.

Because important arteries come together at major intersections at each end of the center, it makes sense to implement a circular traffic pattern that allows traffic to move continuously. That is, vehicles moving around the perimeter of the parking lot along Centre and Beacon streets should be able to do so without having to wait for traffic lights. To make this arrangement work, we suggest reversing the flow of vehicles on Langley Road, and constructing traffic islands at Centre and Beacon streets to channel cars that need to move around the center. One traffic island already exists for this purpose at Beacon Street and Langley Road, but rather than shuttling cars

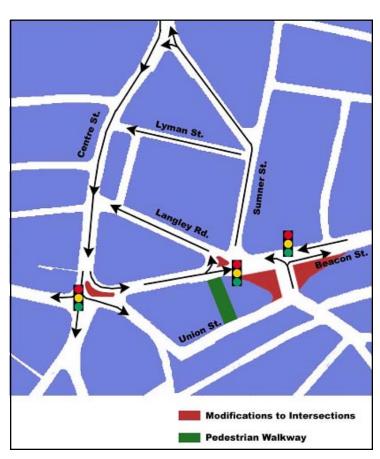


Fig. 13. Option A: Auto-oriented traffic flow diagram

from Langley Road onto Beacon Street, by using Option A, this traffic island would do the opposite.

Drivers seeking to avoid the slower pace of traffic within the center could turn up Sumner Street from Beacon Street, avoiding Langley Road. To handle the additional traffic diverted from Centre Street, parking spots could be removed from one side of Sumner Street.

To further improve the confusing intersection at Beacon Street and Langley Road, we would have the part of Langley Road south of Beacon Street terminate where there is now a small city-owned parcel. This would create a separate intersection with its own traffic signal, to be coordinated with the existing signal a block away.

#### Pedestrian zone

Option B (Fig. 14) deals more with how to improve Newton Centre for pedestrians. The pedestrian passage tying the MBTA station to the center should be widened where it is feasible. The passage should be well-lit, well-marked, and able to handle pedestrian traffic exiting out the back doors of businesses that have storefronts on Beacon and Union streets. In turn, this could increase round-the-clock use of the path. Once pedestrians reach the park on the other side of Beacon Street, they should encounter fewer cars before they reach the stores on Langley Road. Since Langley Road is a secondary street, it could be closed permanently to traffic, except emergency vehicles. This would further enhance the draw of the new park in

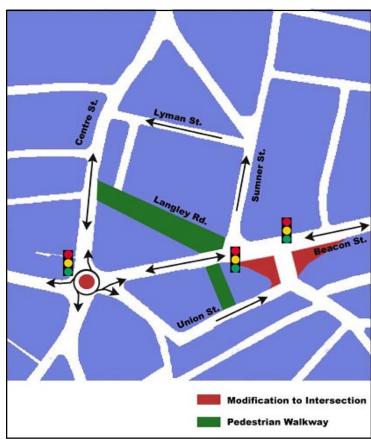


Fig. 14. Option A: Pedestrian-oriented traffic flow diagram

the center, and encourage more outdoor tables in front of businesses along Langley Road.

A traffic island in the middle of the intersection at Centre and Beacon streets would help pedestrians and also provide the option of creating a roundabout, without the need for regular signalization. Option B would preserve the new layout of Langley Road where it meets Beacon Street from the south.

### Implementation

Achieving the changes involved in Option A will involve a relatively small amount of public funds, and some short-term confusion as people get adjusted to new traffic patterns. Given the potential for improvement, the City of Newton should research examples of circular traffic flow

elsewhere in the Boston area, such as Davis Square in Somerville. Option B, which involves closing Langley Road and changing the nature of the pedestrian path between Beacon and Union streets, will require close collaboration between the city and owners of businesses on Langley Road. In addition, the city may need to acquire an easement in order to enhance the pedestrian passage.

To improve links between transit modes, the city and MBTA should collaborate to create better signage in the area of the train station, directing people to the bus and Nexus stops. As new development occurs in the area, the city should also advertise the variety of transit modes to encourage new residents to avoid driving. Train service itself should be enhanced. The MBTA should allow riders to enter and exit the trains from either side and allow them to pay once on the train, to encourage speedier service. The T should also re-examine fares, since the high cost of a single ride from Newton Centre into the city (\$2.50) may discourage people from riding.



Fig. 15. Traffic calming roundabout: Photo refers to proposed round about in Option B



Fig. 16. Pedestrian Islands: Photo refers to proposed traffic islands in both options

## Housing and Mixed-Use

One of our key findings is that Newton is not an affordable place to live. According to Affordable Housing in High-Income Areas: Model Approaches, a report prepared for the City of Newton in 1999, a household would need an income of \$95,000 to afford a median priced home in the City. Since that time the median cost of a house in Newton has reached \$570,000. Newton is also a place where residents have sadly acknowledged the intrusion of monster homes, a trend that plagues Newton because the cost of land is so high and the community is so desirable.



Fig. 17. Attractive, historical home in Newton

However, the quantity and type of housing is not the only element in Newton that is changing. The population is becoming older, household size is decreasing, there are more single person households, and Newton is becoming less ethnically diverse. The housing stock in Newton Centre is composed primarily of single-family residences and homeowners and is becoming more expensive and exclusive. There is the occasional multifamily fixer-upper that comes on the market, or a luxury condominium that costs four times as much as the average retired couple paid for their Newton home 30 years before – but with a third as much space. But for young couples just starting out, working families, and empty-nesters, Newton offers few housing alternatives. In the Framework Plan, the community expressed a desire to address these issues and stated a need for housing that would be affordable to a wider range of households.

Total Housing Units Percent of Householders, White	32,112 91%
Percent of Householders, Over 55	40%
Persons per household	2.59
Percent households, single-person	45%
Percent of homes that are owned	79%
Percent of homes that are affordable	
to persons earning 80% or less of median	5%
income	

Statistics from the Economic Development Division of the City of Newton, Selected Demographic Information from the 2000 Census, as well as HomeAdvisor Technologies Inc. Apartment Guide, and Chapter 40B Affordable Housing List.

#### Recommendations

### Housing above Retail

There are many barriers to creating a more diverse housing environment. New housing must compete for land and resources with other local goals such as open space and schools. However, by building apartments above first floor retail establishments in strategic locations, the City can take advantage of existing infrastructure, create space for additional units without consuming valuable land, and free up land for other types of enterprises. These housing units can be a mixture of types that respond to the City's changing demographics— affordable apartments, condominiums, live-work lofts—and can be a way to enhance the character of Newton Centre's village feeling.





Fig. 18. above: Image shows the current street scape on Centre Street.

Fig.18. below: Image shows potential mixed-use housing/retail development in the same place. (The building in the center of the image does not currently exist at that location.)

Newton Centre's convenient access to public transportation also recommends this approach. By building new housing close to transit areas, compact development decreases the need for people to own as many automobiles, lessening concerns about traffic and parking. With a mix of commercial, social, and civic activities, each within walking distance, developers may reduce the costs of housing because fewer parking spaces are required. By building more than one single family home at a time, there is an opportunity to use market rate units to cross-subsidize some affordable units. The costs of housing can also be decreased because a greater number of units can be constructed on a smaller parcel of land.

There are few large expanses of land on which to build hundreds of units because Newton Centre is relatively built-out. Additionally, there are no infill lots in our area of focus, though several commercial buildings are advertising rental space, and the former post office building on Sumner Street appears to be underutilized. Given a limited amount of space, placing housing above retail is a good alternative that makes economic sense. Without increasing traffic, it can provide the necessary foot traffic for a diverse array of merchants. A truly mixed use neighborhood may also be a long term strategy for economic stability, as commercial properties tend to experience much greater vacancy rates than residential properties in an economic downswing.

Additionally, some more recently constructed buildings present an ideal opportunity to place housing above commercial uses, both because they are one-story structures and because they are situated at the edges where greater density or height could frame and balance existing buildings around the center. However, land use rules influence the challenge of building mixed-use developments by requiring a special permit for an increase in FAR, to change the use of the building, or expand a building's gross floor area. These factors in turn, triggers a requirement for the provision of additional parking spaces. Any request to waive parking space requirements, for example to develop housing units, must also be granted through a special permit.

## Incentive zoning

In some sense, Newton's special permit process acts as an informal mechanism for more direct measures of growth control. Because nearly every type of development change in Newton Centre is constrained by land use rules that require a special permit, the City can provide zoning incentives for a mixed-use neighborhood merely by relaxing some of these requirements in exchange for the desired development types. We define incentive zoning as provisions that require developers to provide certain amenities or qualities in their projects in return for identified benefits, such as rapid processing of applications or greater density. For including housing in new commercial developments or during the rehabilitation of existing buildings in Newton

Centre, developers might receive the following benefits:

An automatic waiver of some aspect of parking requirements, either the quantity or location of parking spaces;

A property tax benefit from the City for a designated number of years, which could be tied to the affordability of the housing units provided;

A density bonus as represented by an increase in FAR;

Priority for city-sponsored community development loans and grants.

#### Parking Requirements

One of the reasons developers may be reluctant to build second story housing units above retail stores is that they cannot make this work because of strict parking requirements. Within the central overlay district (outlined in the section of this report on Land Use), the parking requirement can be waived provided the developer pays into an in-lieu of parking fund. The city can then use the money from this fund to build additional parking in or near the village center. In addition, shared use parking agreements can reduce the required number of necessary parking lots and promote mixed-use and affordable housing development. On street parking in front of buildings can also be counted towards the parking requirement. For smaller building sites (for instance, retail uses of 2,000 square feet or less), the parking requirement could be waived so that smaller retailers would not be priced out by high development costs.

In addition, we know that many people who work in Newton cannot afford to live in Newton. One idea would be to encourage more affordable housing with preference given to those who work in the city. The aim would be to cut down on the number of people traveling in and out of Newton each day. Finally, a focus on transit-oriented development may mean that certain funds would be available for implementation.



Fig.19. Mixed-use development on Union Street.

The Community Preservation Act, which was just approved by Newton voters, will provide a new source of funding for affordable housing. The city can also use tax breaks and low-interest loans to offer incentives to developers who build mixed-use developments and affordable housing. These incentives could be tied to an overlay zoning district to promote development in Newton Centre and in the gateway area.

Traditionally there has been housing above retail in Newton Centre so there are historic models for how this development might look and how it would relate to the community.

## Land Use Recommendations

Several land use regulations should be used to guide future development. These include FAR, frontage, setbacks, building height, parking requirements, and design review. However, before implementing district-wide zoning changes, the amount of actual development that is possible and desirable must be considered on a site-by-site basis. The current FARs in Newton Centre range from .01 to 1.9, just as the lot sizes vary from 3,000 to over 30,000 square feet. Even on the same stretch of street, such as Langley Road, adjacent buildings vary in height. Frontage varies from 5 feet to over 40 feet. Although two stories are allowed as of right in BU1 and BU2, most of the recent development does not contain a second or third floor.

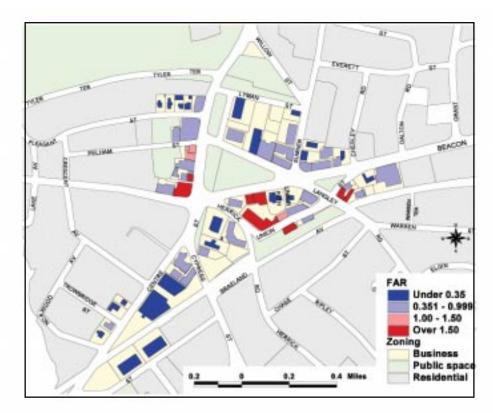


Fig. 20. Existing Floor Area Ratios in Newton Centre

One way to imagine the future of Newton Centre is by creating a scenarioof what could happen given existing land use regulations if the district were to become completely built-out. In other words, a build-out provides an example of what might happen based on what is allowed. Current zoning would not prevent flat, one-story, large-scale retail development and an increase in surface parking as shown in the images on the next page.





Fig. 21.& Fig. 22. Both show one-story buildings exemplary of current zoning requirements

FAR is one measure of the amount of total building space that remains available for development. The average FAR of the 76 parcels we analyzed is just 0.5. Parcels falling under the asof-right FAR of 1.0 might be considered underutilized from a real estate perspective that aims to maximize land value based on a "highest and best use" market analysis. More than 15 of the 76 parcels have FARs below 0.35. The nine parcels with an FAR of above 1.0 are considered built-out. These numbers tell us that Newton Centre could build up to an additional 542,982 square feet of building space given existing zoning conditions. However, this would also require thousands of additional parking spaces depending on building use.

One of the key constraints on development in Newton Centre is the amount of parking spaces required for new buildings or any addition to an existing structure, as well as the requirement that parking must be located on-site. The zoning ordinances allow parking waivers to locate the required parking on a lot which is within 500 feet of the lot on which the principal use is served, but only by special permit (Section 30-19(20)(f)(2)). Therefore on smaller lots, the ground coverage that parking requires is such that an increase in FAR may be an ineffective tool for development.

In conclusion, the zoning regulations make some types of development easier, while more compact development with greater spaces for living and fewer places for cars, is more difficult to achieve. The current landscape reflects a confluence of factors including zoning regulations, a lack of market incentives for second story retail, public fears about "over-development" and onerous parking requirements that come with the construction and expansion of new residences and new commercial spaces.

### **Newton Centre Overlay Districts**

Zoning overlay districts are a tool to achieve the development goals that we have articulated for Newton Centre, including the enhancement of the public realm through a civic-oriented plaza, traffic and pedestrian improvements, mixed-use housing structures, and a more coherent and design-conscious development process. The following zoning recommendations, to be applied within an overlay district in the area surrounding the central parking lot, reflect these goals.

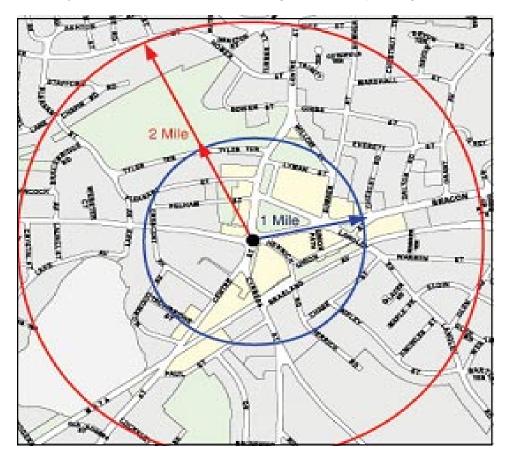


Fig. 23. Map of Overlay Districts.

## Proposed zoning for Overlay Districts

Overlay District	Max# Height	Building Floor Area	Total Allowable	Gross Floor Area	Setbacks (Front)
As of Right	3	36	1.5	No change	Maximum 20

These numbers recommend the minimum changes for an overlay district but do not represent the full range of alternatives.

Additional scenarios are described in the text.

Allow Building Height of Three Stories.

Newton Centre's current building heights range from 1 to 4 stories. Landmarks, such as the H.H. Richardson Church, are several stories taller. Along with development incentives, such as parking waivers, the overlay district should allow buildings to reach 3 stories in height as of right, as long as they meet design review standards. Building heights should also reflect the context of existing structures. One way to accomplish this is to require that new development does not vary more than one story from the height of adjacent buildings.

Increase FAR to 1.5 as of right.

Increasing the FAR above 1.0 will allow buildings of more than one story on those parcels where one-story retail now dominates. This change encourages an efficient use of expensive land, by building up and not out, and promotes a mixed-use development model. FAR may also be tied to parcel size. For example, high FARs on very small parcels may not achieve development that is compatible with the surrounding landscape. To encourage residential development in the overlay district, FAR could be increased only if a project combines residential with commercial use.

Maximum setback from street of 20 feet.

New development should be as close to the street as possible, without disrupting the line of buildings. This form enhances the pedestrian experience and encourages passersby to participate in the commercial or social activity behind the window. Another method is to require a minimum of 50 percent of total building frontage at the front lot line. New building structures should also consider the existing frontage of adjacent buildings, to encourage a coherent streetscape.

Residential parking requirements should be determined by unit size or location. Except in the case of elderly housing, or affordable housing built with federal or state subsidy, no less than two residential spaces per dwelling is now allowed except by special permit. Residential parking requirements in the overlay district could instead be tied to unit size, in the same way that commercial parking requirements are tied to gross floor area. Additionally, Newton's zoning ordinances do recognize the mitigating factor of "adequate transportation services" in conjunction with parking requirements for elderly housing. It is not clear why this should be different for anyone else. Nor should the parking stalls necessarily be located onsite. These considerations should be waived for mixed-use projects in cases where street parking and municipal parking are readily available or in cases where parking space sharing between daytime commuters and residents can be arranged.

The unique character of Newton Centre should be encouraged.

The village character of Newton Centre is nurtured not only by the scale of development, but also by diverse building styles and a range of unique specialty shops that make up the core of the commercial center. This variety makes Newton Centre a visually interesting place to work, shop and live. In walking around the network of streets one can see the fabric of community building over time - 19<sup>th</sup> century elegant churches designed by master architects across from modern banks, student test prep buildings, and coffee shops; colorful Victorian houses for one or two families next to a public transportation route and rising up behind parking lots; early 20<sup>th</sup> century brick storefronts next to modernist signs and stores from the 1950s and 60s. Overlay districts are a way to provide guidelines for protecting these unique characteristics of Newton Centre. Within the Newton Centre Overlay District higher standards for construction, material, and design could be required. New developments could be required to be built in materials and use detailing similar to the historic structures in Newton.

#### Residential use can be required.

The overlay district is also a means of achieving additional planning objectives, such as creating a mixed-use environment. For example, design regulations could require that 50% of the building area be designated for residential use. Developers who do not want to provide the necessary residential component in their project could be asked to pay into an affordable housing fund that could help subsidize further affordable housing development within the overlay district.

Mixed-use developments should be privileged in a design review process.

Through overlay districts, certain types of developments such as one story "mini big box" developments could be discouraged while mixed-use two-story development could be promoted by the design review guidelines. In the town of Belmont, North Carolina, the design standards prohibit any commercial use that encourages patrons to remain in their automobiles while receiving goods or services, except service stations. This prohibits drive-through structures. The town's design standards also require that no less than 75% of the parking places shall be to the rear of the building, which prohibits large parking lots on the street front.

## **Gateway Overlay District**

Impressions of a village center are often determined before people even reach the center. We propose a second, "Gateway" Overlay District, which would have certain design review guidelines for the streets that lead into Newton Centre. The advantage of this proposal is that big box development with large parking lots at the front of buildings could be prohibited and the village "feel" could be maintained. Requirements for FAR, setbacks, street front access, buffering and

landscaping, and location of parking could be mandated by the overlay district and enforced through a design review process. It is important to create a pedestrian and bicycle friendly gateway into Newton Centre so that people who live nearby will walk or bike rather than drive. In addition, bus stops Newton Centre could be enhanced so they are more prominent.

#### Design Guidelines

The creation and application of design guidelines for new development in Newton Centre can be a powerful tool for shaping the future physical character of the village. These design guidelines can reinforce the desirable historic elements of the built form as well as encourage new construction to foster the development of a true village center. Properly crafted, a set of design guidelines can help activate the center by directing development toward a vision for Newton Centre without being overly prescriptive and onerous to developers. What follows is a preliminary list of suggested design guidelines that could be applied to the two overlay districts that our team has proposed.

#### Gateway Overlay District

Development that takes place in the Newton Centre Gateway Overlay District will, to the maximum extent feasible, adhere to the following design standards so as to promote physically the sense of entering into an identifiable village center.

#### Form

A moderate intensification of building form shall be encouraged; to that extent commercial and residential buildings of two to three stories shall be promoted;

A reduction in building setbacks from the street shall be encouraged, ideally 20 to 30 feet; A linear pattern of development shall be encouraged along streets that lead to the center.

## Streetscape

Pedestrian amenities such as, but not limited to, street trees, pedestrian-scale lighting, and planters shall be provided.

### **Buffers and Parking**

Utilities such as lights and parking meters shall be set along the street;

There shall be on street parking;

Off-street parking shall be located in the back of buildings. The parking and service entries shall be appropriately landscaped and sited so as to minimize their exposure to adjacent properties.

#### Newton Centre Overlay District

Development that takes place in the Newton Centre Overlay District will to the maximum extent feasible adhere to the following design standards so as to frame and promote physically the feel of an active village center.

#### Form

The common of the village center – in our proposal a public Forum – shall be surrounded by a series of small, low-scale buildings of two - four stories with retail and commercial activity on the ground floor and residential or office space in the floors above;

One-story buildings shall be discouraged and the development of uniform building heights of adjacent properties shall be encouraged;

Buildings shall front the street with minimal setbacks from the sidewalk.

#### Streetscape

Sidewalk and pedestrian areas shall contain pedestrian amenities such as, but not limited to: street trees, benches, pedestrian-scale lighting, textured paving and surfaces, and sufficient access to sunlight;

Commercial spaces such as restaurants and cafes shall be encouraged to utilize portions of the sidewalk during the temperate months of the year;

Awnings or other appropriate overhangs shall be encouraged to protect pedestrians during inclement weather.

#### Buffers

Utilities such as lights and parking meters shall be set along the street;

There shall be on street parking;

Off-street parking and service entries shall be appropriately landscaped and sited so as to minimize their exposure to adjacent properties.

#### Materials

Exterior building materials shall be consistent in color and texture with existing historic structures. Ideally this shall include the use of brick and stone and exclude excessive expanses of glass or synthetic materials.

#### Retail-Commercial Character

Commercial and retail uses shall be kept below 8,000 sq. ft;

Commercial and retail uses shall strive to provide the greatest mix of suburban services.

#### Preferred Plan

The recommendations outlined by the Newton Centre team could be implemented in two phases under our team's "preferred plan." The first phase would involve short-term changes, alterations to the physical landscape that could occur with a relatively small amount of financing and process. More long-term changes may require more significant monetary outlays on the City's part, in collaboration with state, federal and non-profit funding support.

Short-term, the City's priorities under our plan should be to institute some of the changes in traffic circulation and parking that will make an immediate difference in the quality of life for residents and visitors. The City should also initiate a discussion with the Board of Alderman and the community around design review guidelines and incentives to promote mixed-use development in Newton Centre. These are relatively low-cost alterations that nevertheless will have a significant impact. The City should not begin with changes that discourage residents from visiting Newton Centre. Therefore, it would not make sense to implement increases in the price of on-street parking, for example, as long as there have been no changes in the uses that draw people to the area. It also does not make sense to provide services that do not have enough demand; without added attractions in Newton Centre, it is difficult to justify providing additional Nexus local bus service. These are changes that will have to wait until the city implements some of the long-term changes we have recommended.

## Short-term improvements should include:

Implementation of shared-use parking. Merchants and the city government should work together on a distribution plan for off-street parking spaces that can be shared between employees of local businesses between 9 and 5 p.m. and off-hour visitors who patronize restaurants and other stores that remain open after 5 p.m. This would allow the city to make more efficient use of its current parking areas before developing additional spaces. The idea of valet parking during evening hours could also be implemented without much expense; restaurant owners should have an interest in helping the city implement this concept.

Improved signage to direct motorists and pedestrians around the center, to public transportation, and into parking areas. Better signs can serve two roles. They can help citizens find their way to particular streets and to find municipal parking areas and transportation nodes.

Better access to the center from the MBTA station. The pedestrian passageway connecting the station to the center could be better lit and improved in other ways with marginal budget outlay expense.

Zoning changes to create an overlay district. Proposed overlay districts should be thoughtfully designed to encourage an increase in housing units above commercial spaces. The City can approach the community to solicit ideas about the appropriate design guidelines for the aesthetic features of Newton Centre's future development.

#### Long-term improvements should include:

The Forum and structured parking. These are the aspects of our plan for which the City will have to commit by far the most financial resources, or find significant support from non-profit or state funding sources. As a result, it may be several years before these projects can become a reality.

Housing development within the overlay district. Building housing around the center, particularly along Centre and Beacon streets above the bulk of pedestrian and automobile traffic flow, will frame the central structure and provide definition to the streetscape while activating the village. The City can begin to encourage development in Newton Centre's business district by building a coalition for affordable housing between local employers, who have expressed an interest in mixed-use development and local citizens who have an interest in maintaining the diversity of Newton's economic and social character. The City can also begin to outline appropriate incentives for mixed-use development. These include zoning changes, the institution of a housing trust fund or parking fund, and the development of potential sources of financing for housing including the Community Preservation Act.

#### Conclusions

Hoping to reflect the values expressed in the Framework for Newton's Planning, the MIT team set about to determine how one might think about, and then act on, an orderly, desirable, and possibly controllable future for Newton Centre. The broad brush with which the team painted that future was supported by its reading of Newton's history, its sense of Newton's present, and the views and attitudes of those who live or work in Newton Centre or who simply pass through the district.

The idea of The Forum, for example, developed after consideration of some of the points raised in many of the intercept surveys and business interviews. There, the team found expressed the desire for ways to restore some of the services that had left Newton Centre. The surveys and interviews also suggested the need for a kind of social focal point that had once been represented by the local branch of the library. Similarly, the team's suggested approaches to issues of traffic circulation and parking derive in part from some of the earlier analysis that had been included in village studies from the mid-1980s. Finally, the land use recommendations, including the creation of design guidelines, are presented as elements to be incorporated in future conversations about the nature of Newton Centre — about the ways in which it can more effectively serve the needs of its current and future residents.

#### What's next.

There is, in the business management literature, the notion of a BHAG — defined as a "big, hairy, audacious goal" — by which companies engage the energies and talents of its staff. In putting together its recommendations, the MIT team hopes it has provided the beginnings of Newton Centre's own BHAG, whether it be the view of the parking lot, the imposition of traffic calming devices along Beacon Street, or the idea of zoning overlay districts. Ideally, these ideas will become the basis for an active public discussion. These ideas might not even be recognizable after a certain period of time as the discussion becomes more and more intense and engages more and more of Newton Centre's public. Above all, the team hopes the debate that began with public presentations will continue to be prodded through publication of this document. More to the point, the team is eager to transfer to the citizens of Newton Centre one of its own driving questions — "What if...?" — and looks forward to the answers that will become the visual manifestations of Newton Centre's future. As with all good plans, we know it takes people to make them work, but the results are tangible and real. If a plan is good and reflects the character of the community, years later people will wonder why it was not thought of sooner.